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BELGIC CHARITY,

AND OTHER POEMS.



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Mrs Brent is desired to accept this Book
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she prints.

22nd Aug^t. 1824.

BELGIC CHARITY.

WITH OTHER POEMS.

BY

SIR THOMAS ELM斯LEY CROFT, BART.

PRIVATELY PRINTED.

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BELGIC CHARITY.

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BELGIC CHARITY.

FAR abler hands than mine have waked the strain
Of Joy and Grief, on Waterloo's dread plain ;
Byron and Scott have pour'd their matchless lay,
To mourn the victims of that fearful day,
Wept o'er their harps, and steep'd each sounding chord
In tears of woe for warriors still deplored :
Then, with exulting voices, on the crowd
Of living Heroes well-earn'd praise bestow'd,
And in bright numbers, which can never die,
Wafted their glories to Posterity.

And shall my feeble voice attempt to raise
The song of sorrow, victory, or praise,
For those who fell, or those who still survive,
When in such lofty verse their actions live ?

Shall my unpractised hand presume to seize
The harp that erst has thrill'd to notes like these ?—
No !—but, if touch'd with some celestial fire,
I might employ my unaccustom'd lyre ;
With gentler tones bid all its chords resound,
And shed unwonted harmony around,
Then should its trembling notes ascend the sky,
To sing thy triumph—heavenly Charity !

All-bounteous Maid ! here deign to take thy stand,
Inspire my verse, conduct my erring hand ;
To warm my lay thy magic influence bring,
And make it worthy of the deeds I sing.

Scarce had the morning sun, with tardy light,
Shed its first beams upon the field of fight,
Chasing the sable pall and misty shroud,
Which night had spread o'er the procumbent crowd,
When from the Belgian capital there came
A various host—their general wish the same—

All bore such aid as Art and Wealth supply,
To soothe and heal, refresh and vivify ;
All, by one impulse urged, in eager haste,
Through Soignies' verdant forest breathless pass'd,
Nor stay'd their swift career, till on their view,
Burst the wide field of bloody Waterloo.

There groaning myriads with expiring breath,
In feeble murmurs, vainly call'd for death,
Or, as red streams at each convulsive throe,
Gush'd from their wounds in unimpeded flow,
Gazed on the lifeless bodies strew'd around,
And ask'd the fate their happier foes had found.

What potent arm the gory heaps among,
Guided, unseen, the comfort-bearing throng ?
What power propitious, with benignant hand,
Led through fell'd ranks the sympathizing band ?
Who bade them minister impartial aid ?
Who calm'd their vengeance, and their wrath allay'd ?
Who taught their souls this mighty truth to know,
A foe once conquer'd is no more a foe ?

Thou, Charity ! to all distinctions blind,
'Twas thine to work this wonder on the mind ;
'Twas thine to quell at once the vengeful ire,
That scathes the heart, and lights the eye with fire ;
'Twas thine to bid fierce passion disappear,
And frowns of anger yield to pity's tear ;
Thy form, sweet maid, hung o'er the loaded car,
Which slow convey'd the victims of the war,
And, 'mid tumultuous shrieks and groans of pain,
Watch'd on their way the home-returning train.

Fast to the gate of Belgia's city fair,
Lo, female crowds in anxious haste repair ;
Through peopled streets the living torrent flows,
And leaves them desert as it onward goes ;
The high-born matron, and the faille-clad* maid,
Flock on the road, impatient yet afraid ;

* The “Faille” is made of rich black silk, and greatly resembles the Spanish “Mantilla.” It is a very graceful and picturesque garment, and, in 1815, was universally worn by the inferior bourgeois and marchandes of Brussels. I am sorry to learn that its use is now almost entirely discontinued.

Impatient all, for tender bosoms feel
A warmer glow at pity's soft appeal,
And timid still, for when could Woman's eye
Witness unmoved the pangs of agony ?
Or when, if suffering to exertion call'd,
View'd she distress with feelings unappall'd ?

Change we the scene—let Fancy's eye behold
The vast saloon with roof of fretted gold,
Its tap'stryed walls, and wide unfolding door,
Its frequent mirrors, and its burnish'd floor ;
Late the resort of beauty, youth, and grace,
A thousand lamps beam'd brightly o'er each face ;
Unnumber'd waltzers join'd the giddy round,
Urged to the dance by music's mirthful sound ;
And, as they glanced in quick succession by,
Loud was the laughter, and the revel high.

Alas ! how alter'd now—survey the room—
One solitary taper breaks its gloom,

Throws o'er an hundred beds the dismal ray,
Which, dully glimmering, lights a narrow way
'Mid lowly pallets, in whose long-drawn rows
Recline the warmest friends and deadliest foes.

Here, his firm soul with martial rage imbued,
The son of Gaul, though vanquish'd, unsubdued,
While in the dew of death his eye-balls swim,
Calmly surveys his mutilated limb,
With pallid lips bestows a last embrace
On the dear cross that wont his breast to grace,
Turns on his bloody bed, resign'd to die,
And feebly shouts Napoléon's rallying cry.

With livid cheek, and eye suffused with tears,
There Britain's soldier sunk supine appears ;
Intrepid still as 'mid the battle-fray,
Stranger alike to terror and dismay,
Think not corporeal pain could draw that sigh ;
No dastard fear-drops dim his azure eye ;

But, as the languid pulses scarcely beat,
As Life, retiring, seeks her last retreat,
Say, can we blame if every anxious thought
Of his young bride with heartfelt grief is fraught ?
How should he muse with apathy of mind,
On the loved wife, so soon to be resign'd,
Unused to sorrow, unprepared for strife,
A lonely wanderer on the waste of life ?—
Tremendous death-pangs every nerve convulse,—
Faint, and yet fainter throbs each fluttering pulse,—
Still for her sake new showers of sorrow flow,
And his weak voice, now tremulously low,
As the freed spirit quits its frail abode,
Commends her to his country and his God.

On yonder couch, enveloped in his plaid,
The Scottish warrior's shatter'd form is laid ;
Delirious sleep weighs down his lurid eye,
While o'er his brain terrific visions fly ;
Hark, how he murmurs, “ close our wavering rank—
“ Reserve your fire,—now pour it on their flank.”—

Or, as the pibroch seems to strike his ear,
Advancing foes in serried files appear ;
Starting, he waves his fancied sword on high,
And wakes once more to life and agony.

The heroic Pole, who left his native land,
Rank'd with the brave in Poniatowsky's band,
Whose deadly sabre-stroke and levell'd lance,
So oft have overthrown the foes of France,
Striving in vain to staunch his bosom's gore,
Exhausted sinks, alas ! to rise no more.

Death, hideous, ghastly Death, and writhing Pain,
Would here, uncheck'd, have held their horrid reign,
But that thy voice, soft Charity ! had power
To summon succour in this awful hour,
To nerve with fortitude the female heart,
To calm its tremors, bid its fears depart,
Till, soothed and strengthen'd by thy heav'nly sway,
It meekly dared thy mandate to obey.

Boast, haughty Man ! thy prowess in the field,
Boast thy strong arm too apt the sword to wield,
Boast Nature's miracles by thee unveil'd,
Her mines discover'd, and her mountains scaled,
Boast all the secrets Science can impart,
And all the proud pre-eminence of Art ;
Then, pausing, cry, with supercilious sneer,
“ Where is my rival on this earthly sphere ? ”

Stand forth, rash vaunter ! contemplate this scene,
Here humbly bow, and own thy merits mean.

See, 'mid the labyrinth of lowly beds,
What slender form on tiptoe softly treads ?
Some sainted herald from the orbs above,
Who moves on earth, a messenger of love ?
Some seraph, envoy to the suffering brave,
With power endow'd to solace and to save ?

Vain Man ! what here avails thy strength or skill ?
'Tis Woman, weak, but thy superior still.

Fair, as the white Camellia's op'ning flower,
Ere its young leaves have felt the sun or shower;
Beauteous, as dreams that haunt the mourner's bed,
Recalling rapturous scenes of pleasure fled ;
Chaste, as the fabled Vesta's fane divine,
Pure, as the flame that lit her hallow'd shrine,
The angelic mortal gently glides along,
Dispensing aid to all the suffering throng :
Now silent traverses the darken'd room,
Smiles while she weeps, and half dispels the gloom ;
Now winds the bandage moisten'd with her tears,
Shrinks from the task, but, shrinking, perseveres :
Then, at each shuddering start, each stifled groan,
Whispers in kind, consolatory tone,
Of future worlds, more bright, more calm than this,
Kingdoms of peace, and realms of lasting bliss,
Till dying sinners think their faults forgiven,
And fancy her their harbinger to Heaven.

But not in gilded palaces alone,
Celestial Charity ! thy votaries shone ;

With equal zeal inspired, at thy behest,
In poorer dwellings, anxious thousands press'd
To do thy bidding :—every roof beneath
The Belgian women triumph'd over death.—
Yes, humble artisans, ye great, ye good,
Whose daily labours earn your daily food,
Whose slender fingers frame the costly lace,
Whose skilful hands the flow'ry garlands trace,
Ye with your wealthier comrades dared to vie,
When all perform'd the work of Charity.

High-born and lowly ! how shall we applaud
Your various goodness ?—how your virtues laud ?
To your good deeds no pension'd scribbler pays,
In venal print, his meed of fulsome praise ;
Your's is the praise that shuns the public ear,
Your silent eulogy the soldier's tear.

Yet, say, soft Charity ! when summon'd hence,
Shall they not gain an higher recompense ?

Shall no rich guerdon wait them, when they rise,
From earth released, to denizen the skies?

Benignant Power! methinks I hear thy voice,
In tones of melody exclaim, “ Rejoice,
“ Rejoice, ye blessed, who obey’d my laws,
“ Revered my mandate, and espoused my cause ;
“ Spirits divine on Heav’n’s bright threshold stand,
“ To hymn your welcome to *that* happy land,
“ Where sorrows cease, and endless joy succeeds :—
“ There bliss supreme shall crown your glorious deeds,
“ There, while ye reap your justly-earn’d reward,
“ Celestial Hosts your praises shall record,
“ And sister Seraphs shall your coming bless,
“ And Saints announce eternal happiness.
“ Thus shall ye enter your sublime abode,
“ Beloved by Angels, and approved by God.”

LINE S,

WRITTEN ON THE FIELD OF QUATRE BRAS,

1821.

So bright the sun puts forth his glorious beams,
So fair the field beneath his lustre gleams,
So soft the south-wind wanders o'er the corn,
While on its wing a thousand scents are borne ;
So bright and fair, so peaceful and serene,
So soft, and calm, and undisturb'd the scene,
It seems as if no storm had ever rose,
Or e'er could rise, to break its sweet repose.

But on this lovely spot when last I stood,
What was that field?—a theatre of blood!
The war-fiend here unfurl'd his baleful wing,
Here mock'd at pain, and smiled at suffering ;
Yelling with joy as each new victim bled,
Gloated his eye on hecatombs of dead ;
Steep'd his foul pinions in a sea of gore,
And, drench'd with slaughter, still demanded more.

Yes, for the blue of yonder cloudless sky,
Above us hung a “ sulphurous canopy ;”
For murmuring rill, and carol of the bird,
Were whizzing shot and roaring cannon heard ;—
Bristled the bay'net, gleam'd the deadly glaive,
Where thickest now the golden harvests wave ;—
Where tender hare-bells bend in azure bloom,
Floated the pennon with the warrior's plume ;—
For rural echoes, or the wild bee's hum,
Bray'd the hoarse trumpet, roll'd the hollow drum ;—
And where yon meadow's turf most verdant is,
There fell the fiercest of our enemies.

They fell indeed!—but with them what an host
Of conqu'rors, comrades, brothers, friends, was lost!
What tears bedew'd the bodies of the brave,
As sanguine hands consign'd them to the grave;
What sobs burst forth, as voices join'd in prayer,
Which, but an hour before, had urged the battle there;
What manly bosoms heaved with sorrow's sigh,
Which, but an hour before, throbb'd high in victory.

Alas! among the most deplored of those,
Who, wrapp'd in shrouds of glory, here repose,
Here, on this field, their valour nobly won,
Lies low in earth the gallant Barrington!

Oh! that my feeble hand could justly trace
His manly virtues, and his youthful grace;—
Oh! that my feeble pen could paint his eye,
Where sat enshrined the soul of bravery;—
Or shew his sword, uplifted in the fight,
Flashing through foremost ranks with meteor-light.—

Enough,—surrounded by an heap of slain,
He sunk triumphant on the gory plain ;
Sudden the silver cord of life was riven,
And the freed spirit sprang at once to Heaven !

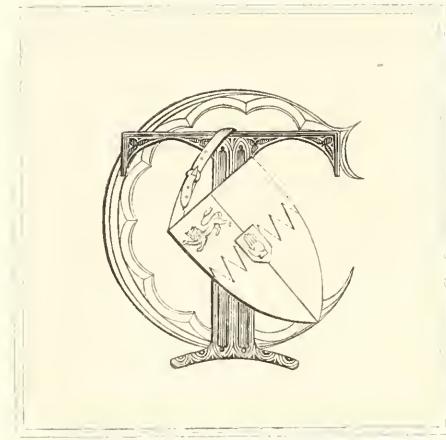
Note.—The Officer alluded to in the foregoing lines, the Hon. Samuel Shute Pereival Barrington, son of Viscount Barrington, was killed in the Action of Quatre Bras, 16th June, 1815, aged seventeen. He was an Ensign in the 1st Foot Guards.

ON A BOY SLEEPING.

SLEEP—and while slumber weighs thine eyelids down,
May no dread phantom o'er thy pillow frown,
But brightest visions deck thy tranquil bed,
And angels' wings o'er canopy thy head :
Sleep on, sweet boy ! may no dark dream arise
To mar thy rosy rest—thou babe of Paradise !

See, where the glowing hands are closely prest,
As when from prayer he softly sunk to rest ;
Mark, how with half-closed lips and cherub smile,
He looks as still he pray'd, and slept the while ;
Yet, yet they seem as if they whisper'd praise,
For all the blessings of his haleyon days.

Bid, oh Almighty Father, God, and Friend !
Religion's glories on his steps attend,
To shine through all the dreary storms of life,
A splendid beacon o'er this world of strife ;—
And, when, to Thee recall'd, he sinks in death,
May prayer and praise still bless his parting breath.



THE END.

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